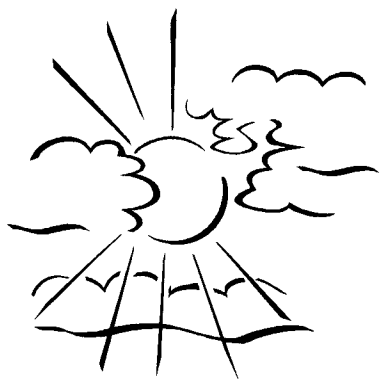


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Tuesday, November 15, 2005

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Freedom closer for state's youngest killer

But Abraham troubled, court hears

November 15, 2005

BY L.L. BRASIER

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Convicted killer Nathaniel Abraham is far from rehabilitated, has trouble controlling his anger, is narcissistic and self-centered, but he'll be walking the streets in 14 months, a judge said Monday. Oakland County Family Court Judge Eugene Moore reluctantly agreed to allow Abraham, 19, to leave the W.J. Maxey Training School in Green Oak Township for day trips to lecture to youth groups, attend addiction therapy groups, tour halfway houses and visit family in Jackson, all the while accompanied by Maxey staff.

He also is to participate in a program that takes him to places such as restaurants, Laundromats and banks to learn life skills. "What we do at this point is try to ensure the rehabilitation of Nathaniel while still trying to protect the public," Moore said. Abraham was just 11 when he shot and killed Ronnie Greene Jr., 19, outside a Pontiac party store in October 1997.

In a case that has drawn international attention, Monday's disclosure was a new setback for hopes of rehabilitating such a young killer.

"I have a lot ... of concern about what's going to happen in the future," Moore said during Monday's 90-minute hearing, as Abraham sat much of the time with his head bowed.

Turning to Abraham, he said, "If you fail here it's going to be unfortunate for you, and may very well be unfortunate for the public."

When prosecutors charged Abraham as an adult, he became the youngest adult murder defendant in Michigan history.

Amnesty International spoke out on his behalf, human rights groups protested and court activities were nationally televised.

The case put a spotlight on how the United States deals with children accused of serious crimes. He was convicted as an adult of second-degree murder, but Moore, the trial court judge, chose to sentence him as a juvenile, meaning he could be released by age 19, but authorities could keep him until age 21. Moore, in making his decision at the time, questioned the wisdom of sending young children to prison for life, and expressed faith Abraham could be rehabilitated.

Under Michigan law, Moore has no choice but to release Abraham in January 2007, when he turns 21.

But Abraham has made sketchy progress in his six years at Maxey, appearing before Moore every three to six months for progress reports.

He has had run-ins with other boys, and staff characterize him as sometimes angry and aggressive.

HISTORY OF THE CASE

Oct. 29, 1997: Nathaniel Abraham, 11, using a stolen .22-caliber rifle taken from a neighbor's house, shoots Ronnie Greene Jr., 19, a stranger, outside a Pontiac party store.

Abraham, wearing his Halloween costume, is arrested a few days later at school. He is charged with first-degree murder.

Nov. 16, 1999: An Oakland County jury convicts him as an adult of second-degree murder.

Jan. 13, 2000: Oakland County Family Court Judge Eugene Moore sentences Abraham as a juvenile to W.J. Maxey Training School, where he will be held at least until his 18th birthday, but as long as his 21st birthday if the judge decides he poses a risk.

January 2007: Abraham will be released into the community.

L.L. BRASIER

A staff psychologist examined Abraham a month ago and in a report issued Nov. 7, said he found Abraham to be troubled, an antisocial young man, arrogant and suffering from notions of grandiosity.

Abraham, the psychologist noted in a written report to the court, faces "subsequent incarceration as a probable consequence" of those traits.

Abraham, the psychologist said, suffers from a "severe personality disorder."

Social worker Harry Adams, who treats Abraham, told the court he sees signs of progress.

Abraham is often seen as a leader among the other boys and sometimes displays signs of responsibility, Adams said.

And Abraham has earned his high school diploma and is studying cosmetology. But Adams told the judge he worries that Abraham still lacks empathy for others, particularly those he has an impact on.

"He has not been totally rehabilitated," Adams told the court. "He needs to make more progress."

In recent months, Abraham has been in trouble for being verbally abusive to staff and was the subject of a police investigation into allegations he had fathered the child of a staff member.

DNA tests showed the baby was not his.

Abraham, however, reportedly asked to borrow a staff member's cell phone so he could call "my baby's mother." The staff member has since left the facility.

Abraham has denied any sexual contact with staff. Maxey officials Monday could provide no details about the investigation.

Oakland County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Deborah Carley expressed grave concern about any new freedoms for Abraham and pledged she would fight any attempt to release Abraham to a halfway house prior to his 21st birthday.

"Somebody needs to stand up for our safety and security and I'm going to do just that," Carley told the judge. "We're talking about a person who should not be released into our community."

Defense attorney Daniel Bagdade said Abraham has made strides -- despite the constraints of years of living in an institution -- and should be granted some trust.

"The time has come where we have to take a chance on this young man," Bagdade said.

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Tuesday, November 15, 2005

Halfway house denied for killer

He was 11 when he fired a sniper shot; now 19, he is likely to remain jailed until he turns 21.

By Jennifer Chambers / The Detroit News

PONTIAC -- With 14 months left until his release to the public, one of Michigan's youngest convicted killers is not rehabilitated enough to be transferred to a halfway house, a judge ruled Monday.

Nathaniel Abraham, 19, continues to resist authority figures and struggle with anger, and lacks empathy for others, according to social worker Harry Adams, who works with Abraham at the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School.

Abraham, who is in state custody until his 21st birthday in January 2007, is serving a sentence at Maxey for second-degree murder.

He was 11 years old in 1997 when he fired a sniper shot from a hilltop in Pontiac, killing 18-year-old Ronnie Green outside a party store.

Abraham was put in maximum-security detention at Maxey when he was 13.

In 2004 he was moved to a medium-security facility at Maxey, where he has worked toward completing a rehabilitation program.

Abraham has "reached an impasse" in his rehabilitation efforts, Adams told Oakland Probate Judge Eugene Moore.

Abraham was accused of having a sexual relationship with a 34-year-old social worker at Maxey. He denied the relationship.

Adams asked the judge to send Abraham to the Woodland West Special Needs Transition Center, where the 19-year-old can build his social skills and experience "real-world" situations such as ordering food in a restaurant, washing his own clothes at a laundromat and obtaining a state identification card.

Adams said Abraham "expresses frustration to the point that he wants to smash things so he won't hit someone."

He has been diagnosed with a severe personality disorder.

Oakland Assistant Prosecutor Deborah Carley said Abraham needs to stay locked up until he is 21.

"He is the longest-running resident they have at Maxey, and he still isn't rehabilitated," Carley said.

"We've given all the therapy and anger management we can, and we're still talking about the same problems."

In January, Moore said he would like to see Abraham moved to a halfway house by January 2006, when he has one year left under state supervision.

But, Moore said, until Abraham improves his behavior, he will have to remain at Maxey.

The judge did approve supervised visits with an aunt and uncle who live in Jackson, supervised visits to halfway houses and work at the Woodland transition center.

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Published November 15, 2005
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Juvenile detainee given permission to visit his uncle Teen, 19, convicted of murder at 11, gets judge's OK for trips

By Tom Krisher
Associated Press

PONTIAC - Nathaniel Abraham, who was convicted of murdering a man with a rifle shot at age 11, will be able to leave a juvenile detention center to visit an uncle and attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings, a judge ruled Monday.

But it's still unclear if Abraham had a sexual relationship with a female staff member at the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School in Livingston County, where he has been sentenced to stay until he turns 21 on Jan. 19, 2007.

DNA tests showed that Abraham is not the father of the staff member's child, a Maxey official said Monday in a review hearing in Oakland County Probate Court, according to Deborah Carley, chief deputy prosecutor for the county.

Advertisement

But the Maxey official told Chief Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore that Maxey will not investigate further to see if Abraham, now 19, had sex with the woman, Carley said.

"We still don't know if they had a sexual relationship or not," she said.

Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for Department of Human Services, which oversees Maxey, said she could not comment on the matter because of privacy laws. Abraham's attorney, Daniel Bagdade, could not be reached for comment.

Under Moore's ruling, Abraham can attend Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and visit the uncle in Jackson as long as he's accompanied by Maxey officials, Carley said. According to Carley, Abraham had a problem with alcohol and marijuana before he entered Maxey.

He has been in juvenile detention since the 1997 shooting death of Ronnie Lee Greene, 18, in Pontiac. He was convicted of second-degree murder as an adult but sentenced as a juvenile.

Nate can determine his fate

Web-posted Nov 15, 2005

'In latest hearing for convicted killer, judge says, 'Juvenile justice system is looking at you

By STEPHEN FRYE
Of The Oakland Press

Only 14 months away from being released from state custody, Nathaniel Abraham has 10 weeks to prove to a judge he is ready to begin testing his ability to live in the freedom of society.

Meanwhile, his attorney said Abraham denies having sex with a staff member. Both his long-term prognosis, with references to a psychological examination, and the allegations of Abraham having sex dominated the Monday review hearing for the 19-year-old convicted murderer. A killer at age 11, Abraham hopes to convince Oakland County Chief Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore that he can be trusted to live outside state custody.

"There's no guarantee he's going to a halfway house," Moore said. "I haven't made up my mind on it." The judge told Abraham that he holds many cards in his young hands.

"Whether you like it or not, the juvenile justice system is looking at you," Moore said, adding that he will release him to the community setting only if he is confident public safety will not be threatened. "Ultimately, you're the one who makes that decision - success or failure."

The judge, who sentenced Abraham as a juvenile in 2000, heard from both social workers and attorneys, all recommending his course of action.

Defense attorney Daniel Bagdade said the decision to sentence Abraham as a juvenile was because he had a chance at rehabilitation.

"If we are going to prepare Nate for life beyond Maxey, we've got to do it now," Bagdade said. "We've got to take a chance with this young man."

Social worker Harry Adams said Abraham was not totally rehabilitated but had reached an "impasse," unable to progress any further after reaching the last stage of the Maxey program, an education program designed to rehabilitate troubled youths.

But Deputy Chief Oakland County Prosecutor Deborah Carley said it is too late and the only way to ensure public safety is to keep Abraham locked up. She is absolutely against any early release.

"It's all we have," Carley said.

She went through a psychological report of Abraham, showing the youth has a personality disorder < including being quick to anger, grandiosity and feelings of persecution, as well as a fear of violent revenge from his victim's family if he were to return to Pontiac < and could be at high risk for incarceration.

"I can go on and on and on," she said. "We're still talking about the same problems. He's a person who should not be released to the public."

She said she is most puzzled about the fear of revenge because Ronnie Green's family has expressed only concern for Abraham's rehabilitation and, while it has called for accountability, it has not accused the system of not punishing him.

Meanwhile, more details were given on a August incident in which Abraham made a ganglike physical gesture "to come and get this" to a staff member during a softball game. The troubling part was that it took eight times discussing the issue for Abraham to admit responsibility, Carley said.

Social worker Elaine Rosati, a guardian appointed by the court, said it is crucial for Abraham to begin finding family support. She also said it was positive for Abraham to share his story with other youths as he has done, telling them about his early involvement with drugs and guns.

He shot Green in the head outside a Pontiac store in 1997.

While the investigation into a rumor that Abraham had sex with a staff member, a 34-year-old social worker, and fathered her child is closed, Carley would like a complete investigation into what goes on at the W.J. Maxey Training Center.

Testimony on Monday showed that the rumors started after Abraham asked to use a cell phone to "call his baby's mother." Abraham explained that was a misunderstanding and that he wanted to call his mother, though no explanation was given as to why Abraham did not use the school phone to call his mother, as he typically does.

Bagdade said the sex did not occur.

"He totally denies it," Bagdade said.

Abraham will come back Jan. 17 for his next review hearing, when Moore may allow him to be released to a halfway house.

Children facing life

Web-posted Nov 13, 2005

First-degree murder means life behind bars, regardless of age

By Stephen Frye
Of The Oakland Press

Life without parole. If it sounds unpleasant, downright harsh, it's supposed to. In Michigan, where the death penalty was banned in 1846, the mandatory punishment for a first-degree murder conviction is life in prison without the possibility of parole. No matter how old one is, that's a long time because there is no hope for release, unless a governor is willing to risk political backlash and commute the sentence - an almost impossible hope.

But for teenagers who are not yet considered adults, is life in prison without parole a reasonable punishment? Oakland County's history over the past four decades is fairly rich on this issue.

One state senator, citing a study that found Michigan to be among the top states with such offenders, is pushing a bill that would ban life-without-parole sentences for offenders under age 18. Right now, a 17-year-old is an adult in the eyes of Michigan's criminal code.

In Oakland County, many youths have been charged with first-degree murder, some in cases that stunned the community, others in cases that quietly moved through the courts.

Some have avoided life without parole. But 40 others are in prison now, serving life without parole crimes committed in Oakland County before they were 18 - of 313 such offenders in Michigan prisons. All 40 committed first-degree murder.

Today, these men and women range in age from 19 to 61.

Some, such as Nathaniel Abraham, Michael Conat and Brandon Carnell, avoided the life-without-parole term because they were sentenced as juveniles or convicted of lesser charges.

Forty others, such as Joseph Passeno and Bruce Micheals, who kidnapped and killed a Rochester Hills couple in order to access their ATM accounts in 1989, were convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced as adults to life in prison, where they sit today.

Tough-on-crime laws were passed in the late 1980s and mid-1990s because of highly publicized violent crimes. Of the 40 Oakland County offenders, 25 committed their crimes within a decade, between 1987 and 1996.

And today, three adolescents currently are charged with murder and face life without parole in Oakland County Circuit Court. In all three cases, the alleged violence is chilling. One is accused of stabbing his mother to death; one is said to have fired a gun into a car in a gang-related incident; and one allegedly returned to the scene of a carjacking with the intent of killing the victim, David Lee Bingham, a 38-year-old father of two, who was shot four times.

Two of the three were 15 at the time of their alleged crimes; one was 17.

Do young killers, if convicted of first-degree murder, deserve a second chance because of their ages?

State leaders will have to determine what is too young to be sentenced to prison for life.

Proposed change

State Sen. Liz Brater, DAnn Arbor, said young offenders deserve consideration for a second chance, not a guaranteed way out of prison, and she would do that by banning life-without-parole sentences for offenders under 18.

"Basically, they were children at the time when they committed their offense," Brater said. "We acknowledge they committed severe crimes. We believe they should get a second chance. We believe at some time in their lives, they should go before the parole board."

A recent study by Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch revealed that Michigan ranked second among states with offenders under 18 who were sentenced to life without parole. Several states, though, such as Texas and New York, do not have such sentences. Nationwide, at least 2,225 life-without-parole inmates were under 18 when they convicted their crimes, according to the Amnesty and Human Rights study.

This study and another by the American Civil Liberties Union showcase individual cases in which life without parole seems harsh. Some offenders did not do the actual killing, and others came from abusive homes.

As Michigan's get-tough-on-crime legislation of the 1990s becomes an expensive burden on the state, lawmakers have sensed that public fear of rampant violent crime has shifted to decrying prison expenses, especially as education spending and revenue sharing with municipalities have shrunk.

Brater cited a recent Wayne State University poll that showed the public favors not locking young murderers away forever, as 72 percent of those polled believed violent offenders under 18 are strong candidates for rehabilitation.

"I'm not saying release everybody automatically," Brater said. "All we're asking with this legislation is, 'Take another look.' This has to be looked at on a case-by-case basis, and that's what parole boards do. They deserve a second chance."

Oakland County Prosecutor David Gorcyca does not want a complete ban on life without parole, calling it a "tool in his arsenal to fight crime."

"I don't think it should be used in every case, but I certainly would like it as a tool to protect the public," Gorcyca said of life without parole as a sentence.

Right now, for a first-degree murder conviction, the law mandates a life-without-parole sentence. One option might be to return authority to judges to impose the sentence if they see fit and not tie their hands.

Gruesome history

A look back at the 40 cases from Oakland County reveals that even an affluent area cannot avoid violent bloodshed.

These cases showcase both gruesome cruelty and pure coldbloodedness. Some are revolting, with children stabbed to death; others are stunning in the slight amounts for which victims died. Michael Kvam, who was 17 when he and another man raped and killed a woman, a teenager and a little girl in Avon Township, now Rochester Hills, in 1984, shook one judge enough to change his stance on the death penalty.

And Sean Sword was 17 when he shot and killed a man working in a Rochester Hills party store in 1994, ending a string of armed robberies. Sword testified at his trial that he didn't like the tone of the victim, who told him the store was being closed: "The way he said it ... I just pulled out the gun."

Several of the offenders fit the profile of one who Brater said might deserve a second chance, coming from broken or abusive homes and having mental problems.

Anthony Bonelli's attorney, James Andary, said the then-17-year-old had "slipped through the cracks" and should have been institutionalized when he drowned a girl who had been his friend in Orchard Lake in 1989. Robert Charles Cook, who was 17 in 1969, claimed that voices told him to climb onto a roof and shoot at people when he killed a motorcyclist.

And several of the cases feature participants who did not do the actual killing, though they helped cover up the crimes and shared in the stolen rewards. Some of these cases include: Barbara Hernandez, then 16, watched as her 20-year-old boyfriend cut a man's throat and stabbed him 25 times so they could steal his car.

Jennifer Pruitt, who was 17, watched as her 23-year-old girlfriend stabbed an elderly man 27 times - after they had returned to his home a second time, having already stolen \$93, cigarettes and other items.

John Polick was 16 when, during a break-in, he shined the flashlight on a 67-year-old woman as his elder brother beat her so badly that she later died. Polick helped steal a television from the woman's Waterford Township home. Both brothers were sentenced to life.

All of these cases feature one shared quality, which is why prosecutors believed they belonged in prison for the rest of their lives.

For these killers, life was cheap.

But in Oakland County, generally, these offenders' rights were well-protected.

Intense legal battles

While poor legal representation sometimes leads to overturned convictions, the cases from Oakland County tend to feature top lawyers.

Prominent defense attorneys such as Larry Kaluzny, Mitchell Ribitwer and Jerome Sabbota tried some of the cases. The late James S. Thorburn, who later served as a circuit judge known to challenge prosecutors, helped represent the county's oldest teenage offender still in prison, Sheldry Topp, who stabbed a county attorney to death in 1962.

Perhaps the biggest legal fight involved a teenager who shot somebody just because he didn't have a match to light his cigarette.

In 1980, Ronnie C. Waters, then 17 and with a group of friends acting tough at the Miracle Mile Drive-In theater in Bloomfield Township, fired a handgun into a car, injuring a Clarkston man and killing his wife, 28-year-old Deborah Ann Porcelli.

Waters was defended by one of Oakland County's top lawyers, the late William Waterman, who went on to sit on the 50th District Court bench and recently had Pontiac's district court building named after him.

Waterman argued that the shooting was "compulsive, inexplicable, ridiculous" and deserved a second-degree murder charge with a chance at parole. A district judge agreed, but then-Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson successfully countered that it was a "coldblooded execution," and two circuit judges and the state's higher courts agreed.

With the first-degree charge holding up, Waters will not get out of prison without a governor's signature - as the law stands now.

Given a break

Other teenage killers from Oakland County were given a break, even in some of the most notorious cases.

Michael Anthony Conat, now 23, shot his younger sister to death in Rochester Hills at age 16. After a lengthy debate, he pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced to at least 25 years in prison.

Brandon Carnell, who was 14 when he killed his parents and sister in his Springfield Township home in 1988, was sentenced as a juvenile and held until he was 19. Since then, he has rebuilt a life without crime and is married and deeply involved with his church.

Ribitwer, who represented Carnell, said the mandatory nature of life-without-parole sentences is the problem when it comes to juveniles.

"It's something that should be discretionary for the judges," said Ribitwer, who now is defending a boy who was 15 when he allegedly stabbed his mother in Rochester Hills.

Pointing to the success of Carnell, Ribitwer said: "The problem is the Legislature has authorized prosecutors to decide if a 15- or 16-year-old child will be charged as an adult. The system puts a tremendous amount of discretion into the hands of the prosecutor," who represent one side of the issue.

Previously, prosecutors petitioned the court to charge a juvenile as an adult, and a dozen different criteria were examined in detail before a judge made the decision. Ribitwer said judges, who stand as the neutral party in a case, should have the authority.

But even judges must weigh the potential political disaster of giving a teenager a break and having him or her kill again.

A blown second chance

One case highlighted the fears that judges, prosecutors and legislators feel when deciding to give someone a second chance.

In 1987, Donyelle Black was a teenage terror awaiting a tragic ending. At age 15, he and another boy raped Wanda Sutherland, 39, repeatedly and, ignoring her many pleas for mercy, killed her. She was shot three times in a wooded area near her apartment off Orchard Lake Road in Pontiac on July 14, 1987, by Black, whose life of crime started at age 11 and included drugs, theft and assaults.

The boy had pulled her from her car at gunpoint after he and the friend, 14-year-old Calvin Hirsch, decided to rob someone. After they raped, robbed and beat her, Black then shot her in the head, Hirsch later testified.

While Black received life in prison upon his conviction, Hirsch pleaded guilty to second-degree murder and was sentenced as a juvenile. He served five years and was released at age 19.

"There's nothing worse than watching someone walk down the hallway because you can't keep them anymore," said Deborah Carley, chief deputy prosecutor in Oakland County. "It's not fair to the victims and it's not fair to the community."

In 1996, at age 23, Hirsch shot a couple over a \$13 drug debt owed by someone else. The man was injured and his 35-year-old fiancée, Dora Lisa Shaw, was killed. A friend of hers owed Hirsch the \$13. Hirsch finally was sentenced to life in prison.

"With two homicides to his credit in the past 10 years, Calvin Hirsch has dug his own grave," said Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor John Pietrofesa at the time. "We just put him in it. Prison did nothing to rehabilitate him."

Whether incarceration can save a young offender is the question remaining with the county's youngest killer.

A killer at 11

Nathaniel Abraham, the area's most infamous young killer, was 11 when he shot 19-year-old Ronnie Green Jr. in 1997 in Pontiac. He will soon be freed because he was sentenced as a juvenile by Oakland County Probate Judge Eugene Arthur Moore.

No matter what, Abraham will be released in 14 months, and the judge, social workers and prosecutors have closely monitored his progress at the W.J. Maxey Boys' Training School near Ann Arbor.

Abraham, who turns 20 in January, wants to go to a halfway house for his last year of custody. He is to be in court Monday for a regular review hearing, a public examination into whether a child killer can be rehabilitated.

"He is the reason why we should have life in prison without parole," said Carley, who regularly presses social workers and state officials to present all information on Abraham's status, which has been marred by problems, including assaults, slow progress and a recent investigation into whether he fathered the child of a worker there. DNA tests showed he wasn't the father.

One woman hates seeing the continued stories about Abraham, finding the attention paid to him with such a public upbringing hurtful instead of helpful.

Flawed system?

Betty Montgomery, 67, of Pontiac said she fears racism is at root for making laws so tough for young offenders, many of whom are black and come from urban areas. While Oakland County ranks second in the state with the 40 young offenders sentenced to life, Wayne County is on top of the list with 123, according to the ACLU study.

"Our system hasn't made it any better," she said, believing the state's resources lack quality.

But too often, she said, young men fall victim to circumstances and lose their lives with one bad decision.

"These are young people," Montgomery said. "They never got a chance to display their abilities. They get into drugs and they are gone. We don't have adequate programs in Oakland County for kids who are at risk with problems."

Carley, the chief deputy prosecutor, appreciates the questions society must ask as it blends public safety with properly considering the circumstances of each case.

Easy answers are impossible with this issue, and solutions cannot cover every case. Carley said prosecutors do not take lightly their role in charging a juvenile as an adult.

"They are very, very difficult," Carley said. "You need to look at each case individually."

But she said life without parole has served as a deterrent, knowing that their ages will not prevent them from the full punishment society has to offer.

Currently in court

Three teenagers younger than 18 are in Oakland County courts and charged with murder.

Christopher Dankovich was 15 and a freshman at Rochester Adams High School when charged with stabbing his mother 111 times in their Rochester Hills home on the night of April 24 or morning of April 25. Now 16, he is expected in court Tuesday for a preliminary exam. Charged with open murder, a jury could convict him of either first-degree or second-degree murder.

Xiong Pheng, an accused gang member, was 15 when he allegedly fired a gun into a car after a Hmong wedding ceremony, killing Yang Chong, 17, on May 28. His first-degree murder trial is scheduled for February.

And Christopher Eugene Jackson, who was 17, is accused of being the triggerman in a case that shook even veteran cops who had seen it all. After carjacking David Bingham's pickup truck, Jackson and his co-defendant, Cordarrel Landrum, are accused of driving around the block, returning to the Pontiac gas station and then executing Bingham as he spoke to police dispatchers. Jackson is due in court for a pretrial hearing on Wednesday.

Landrum, now 19, was 18 at the time of the shooting. Police believe he knew Jackson was going to shoot Bingham, and prosecutors believe both are equally responsible and are both charged with first-degree murder.

The prosecutor handling this case said the proposed change in the law would be "monumentally ironic" and not serve justice.

"It would be ironic if the actual shooter gets some kind of reduced sentence and the getaway driver has to go to prison for the rest of his life," said Assistant Oakland County Prosecutor John Skrzynski. "He (Jackson) is the one who they actually see doing the deed. That was such a coldblooded thing. He allegedly returned to the scene to execute this guy. He came back to eliminate him as a witness.

"It's hard to explain to a grieving family that the actual murderer doesn't have to pay the same price as the getaway driver. It wouldn't make sense to them, and it wouldn't make sense to anybody else."

One brother's opinion

And for the brother of David Bingham, such a change in the law would not be right.

"Anybody who commits a heinous crime like this was supposedly done, I think you should pay the highest price for what you've done," said Terry Bingham of Shelby Township. "I think you know what you're doing when you're 17 years old. If you're man enough to have sex with somebody, you're man enough to know what you're doing."

David Bingham visited his brother's home three or four times a week for laughs and hanging out.

"It's a void in my life," said Terry Bingham, adding that the pain his family now feels will never go away. "His sense of humor was one of a kind. An hour with him, and I'd need about 10 minutes by myself to calm down. He was always happy about something. Even when he was kind of upset, he always tried to make a joke about it."

On July 5, David Bingham stopped for gas on his way to work. Terry Bingham said he always thinks of his brother's two children, ages 10 and 14, who have lost their father.

"With a heinous crime, like murder or rape, you don't give them a second chance, because they are sick people," Terry Bingham said. "We don't need people like that on the streets."

Cost of security?

Carley agrees with Terry Bingham, that murderers do not belong free in society.

"If life in prison without the possibility of parole is a great enough deterrent, maybe it's the right thing," said Carley, who was hired as a prosecutor on the day of Glenn and Wanda Tarr's slaying in 1989, a day she remembers vividly because of the shock at the two fresh-faced teenagers who kidnapped and killed them.

Today, the faces of Joseph Passeno and Bruce Micheals show a life spent in prison, with Passeno's numerous facial tattoos most striking.

Brater, though, believes that throwing away the key may be the wrong answer in every cases, partially because of the expense. She said one out of every \$5 in the state's general fund goes to prisons, and that number has to be reduced - a difficult task with such tough sentencing laws.

"We do have to look at the possibility of rehabilitation," Brater said.

Barbara Levine, of the Citizens Alliance of Prisons and Public Spending, said the 1983 state budget saw only 5 percent of the general fund go to corrections. Tough-on-crime laws have pushed that to 20 percent with \$1.8 billion spent on prisons from Michigan's general fund.

"Crime rates have been falling pretty steadily since the early 1980s," Levine said. "Crime is directly influenced by the economy."

And the state leaders must acknowledge that teenage killers lack the maturity and impulse control of adults, she said.

Also, her organization has said that once these offenders hit their 30s or 40s, they are the least likely to re-offend when released.

"To just throw them (juveniles) away ... and to tell them there is no chance of being rehabilitated, it is not civilized," Levine said. "It is not what most of the world does."

According to the Human Rights study, only Israel, Tanzania and South Africa have such juvenile offenders serving life without parole.

"It is a waste of life and resources, and it is not necessary to keep the public safe," Levine said.

"I think the budget is going to be the driving factor in this."

First-degree facts

First-degree murder is the only crime that features a sentence of mandatory life in prison without parole. First-degree murder can be charged in two ways: premeditated murder or felony murder.

Felony murder is a homicide that occurs during the commission of a selected number of felonies. Typically, it involves armed robbery, but it can also come from child abuse, arson or rape.

Premeditation involves planning and it can take seconds or days. Instead at looking at the time, jurors consider whether a man or woman had time to reconsider their actions.

Nov 15, 12:16 PM EST

Teen accused of stabbing mother 111 times waives preliminary exam

By BREE FOWLER
Associated Press Writer

ROCHESTER HILLS, Mich. (AP) -- A teenager accused of stabbing his mother 111 times waived his right to a preliminary examination Tuesday.

Christopher Dankovich, 16, did not speak during his brief court appearance in Rochester Hills other than to acknowledge to District Court Judge Nancy Tolwin Carniak that he had agreed to waive the hearing.

Carniak did not set a date for the teenager's circuit court arraignment, but it was expected to take place later this month.

Dankovich has been charged as an adult with open murder. He is accused of stabbing his mother, Diane Michele, 50, whose body was found in her Rochester Hills home on April 25. The teen was arrested later that day at his family's cabin in St. Helen, more than 100 miles to the north in Roscommon County.

Lawyers for both sides said they were in the process of negotiating a possible plea deal in the case.

Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Lisa Ortlieb stressed that prosecutors will not agree to any deal that would allow Dankovich to plea to lesser charges. What attorneys are negotiating is how many years the teen would spend behind bars if he is allowed to plead guilty to second-degree murder, she said. Dankovich will continue to be held without bond in a juvenile detention center and could face life in prison if convicted of first- or second-degree murder.

Defense attorney Mitchell Ribitwer said his client is receiving counseling and doing well in school at the detention center. He said he hopes that any plea deal would allow those things to continue.

Authorities said Michele had discovered that her son was using the Internet to look at pornography and learn how to make weapons. She also found a gun that her son made out of PVC pipe filled with gunpowder and marbles, they said.

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Published November 15, 2005

Prescription drug coverage: Medicare sign-up begins

By Chris Andrews
Lansing State Journal

Medicare prescription drug coverage is on the way in Michigan: 78 plans, 18 companies, countless headaches.

Sign-up begins today, but many may need until the May 15 deadline to choose a plan that's right for them.

"Overall, it's a good benefit," said Marion Owen, executive director of the Tri-County Office on Aging. "People have choices, but it's pretty overwhelming and pretty confusing."

But don't panic. Help is available, and you've got plenty of time to make the right decision. Here are some of the most important things to know:

Who's eligible?

Any senior citizen 65 or older or person with a disability who is on Medicare.

What's the benefit?

Help paying for prescription drugs through a variety of private plans. There are dozens of choices.

What's the cost?

Premiums range from \$13.75 a month to \$65.15. The standard deductible is \$250, but some plans have less. Co-pays vary as well.

Key dates

Today: Sign-up begins.

Jan. 1: Coverage takes effect.

May 15: Deadline for signing up without penalties. There's a 1 percent premium penalty each month after that.

How do I sign up?

After you pick a plan, contact the plan by phone or Internet. Some companies allow you to apply online.

Need help choosing?

Call (800) 803-7174. You can get phone help or set up an appointment with the Tri-County Office on Aging.

You also can use Medicare's Prescription Drug Plan Finder at www.medicare.gov or by calling (800) MEDICARE.

Notable

Make sure the plan you choose covers the drugs you need.

If you drop employer coverage, you might not be able to get it back.

SUSAN TOMPOR: Drug plans a maze, so here's some help

There's time to sift choices

November 14, 2005

BY SUSAN TOMPOR
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

After all the hype and the hoopla, Tuesday's the day when Medicare recipients can finally begin picking a plan and signing up for the government's new prescription drug coverage that kicks in as soon as January.

So are seniors ready?

Absolutely not. And I say that after talking to a long list of seniors.

This remains one confusing, complicated and, so far, glitch-filled process.

No doubt about it, the D in Medicare Part D still stands for dumbfounded.

"I was reading the Medicare book -- and after I read part of it, I came to the conclusion that I couldn't understand it," said Virginia Romstad, a 77-year-old Rochester widow who takes seven prescription drugs a day. "It doesn't really give you any answers."

Yet there's hope: No one must pick a plan right now. You've actually got from Tuesday until the end of the year to enroll -- if you want coverage to begin in January.

And honestly, if you can't do something by December, you still have until May 15 to pick up benefits for at least half of 2006.

No one needs to panic. Many experts are urging seniors to take their time and, above all, stay away from anyone charging hundreds of dollars to come into their homes to explain this stuff. The scams are out there.

This is the most significant addition to Medicare in 40 years. It's the first time Medicare -- whose health insurance program covers 42 million seniors and disabled people -- has offered an outpatient prescription drug benefit.

It affects all recipients

The new program isn't just for low-income seniors. All Medicare recipients could qualify, with 28 million to 30 million seniors expected to enroll this year.

PART OF A SERIES

Come back to the Free Press this week for more coverage of the Medicare Part D drug-plan sign-up period. We'll look at more seniors trying to choose drug plans and revisit them in coming months as they make their decisions.

RELATED CONTENT

What you should know about Medicare Part D

Where to get more information

Free counseling and seminars around metro Detroit

Facing dozens of plans, Royal Oak woman wants answers

MARCIA AND LESTER WEINER

Ages: Marcia, 73. Lester, 78.

Hometown: Royal Oak.

Living on: Social Security and investments. No pension. Spend more than \$50,000 a year to live half the time in Michigan and half the time in Florida.

Drugs: He takes seven prescription drugs -- including Coumadin, which is a blood thinner, and Actos, which helps control blood sugar. He says he has good coverage through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Marcia Weiner had been spending about \$233 a month for five drugs -- Lipitor, which treats high cholesterol; Fosamax, which treats osteoporosis; folic acid; Hydrochlorothiaz, which treats hypertension, and Lotensin, a blood pressure drug. Her doctor recently took her off Lotensin. So now, she needs to research a Medicare Part D plan that would cover the four drugs.

Marcia's advice to other seniors: She's surprised that she still needs to tell some friends that Part D coverage is not just for low-income seniors. It's important to understand that even seniors who have modest means or are wealthy can benefit -- especially if you do not have retiree drug coverage from your former company.

And when shopping for a plan, she reminds friends: "You have to find out what companies cover your drugs."

She's looking for a plan accepted by pharmacies in Michigan, Florida and other states.

While President George W. Bush made good on a campaign promise to make prescription drug coverage part of Medicare, this deal has been criticized from the start for its cost and complexity. We're talking about drug coverage that many consumers must sign up for -- and often pay a monthly premium to get. Most seniors nationwide will have at least 40 different drug plans to consider.

In Michigan, retirees are looking at 78 plans from 18 companies. Granted, some plans are available only for residents who live in specific counties or cities. Some plans are managed-care plans that combine additional medical coverage with drug benefits for Medicare beneficiaries. Premiums can range for nothing each month for drug-only coverage to \$135 a month for some managed-care plans with drug coverage.

Consumers also need to wade through a variety of monthly premiums, co-pays and deductibles. And then, not all insurers will cover all drugs.

Just picking the plan with the lowest premium -- or no monthly premium -- isn't always the best option, based on how many drugs you take and their costs. It's no surprise that seniors are uncertain. According to one survey, 6 out of 10 seniors said they either didn't understand the benefit at all or too well.

About four in 10 seniors reported that they didn't know whether they'd enroll in a Medicare drug plan for 2006, according to a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Harvard School of Public Health.

"I think people are going to be mad when they understand how difficult it's going to be to understand how it affects them," said Oscar Paskal, 85, a retired DaimlerChrysler AG employee.

"Medicare, they understand how it works. For most people, it works fine."

The Detroit retiree got a letter from his former employer (DaimlerChrysler), and his union (the UAW), telling him that his prescription drug coverage is better than a Medicare Part D plan. So he will not shop around for any new plans. He's staying with what he has.

For others without strong retiree drug benefits, it's a great relief to know that you don't have to enroll right now in a Part D plan -- especially when the early process for reviewing plans has had plenty of setbacks.

One mega-mess: A much-touted Medicare computer program that's supposed to help seniors figure out which plan is best for them was supposed to be fully functional in mid-October but still wasn't running well last week.

And many seniors haven't exactly been impressed with the official government handbook that outlines some of the new rules. Or some of the seminars so far.

Romstad attended a talk on the new Medicare Part D, but she said that didn't help much. She is considering going to a CVS drugstore, which is offering help on the process.

She said that, eventually, she'll pick some plan. She has no idea which one.

"Everybody's telling me I better sign up," Romstad said.

One drug, Lopressor, which is used to treat hypertension, costs her \$200 for a 90-day supply. She says she pays \$50 or so for another prescription. Some generics cost \$12.

Romstad worked for 10 years at the former Winkleman's women's clothing store in Oakland Mall in Troy and has retirement benefits from her husband.

But she'd still like to find a less expensive way to pay for her prescription drugs, if she can.

Sure, seniors have gotten marketing material and the Medicare booklet at home. Some attended speeches or seminars. But the early discussions didn't get down to the nitty-gritty of how to pick the right plan.

And it's not easy.

Yet it's not exactly something you can ignore.

A key deadline to remember is that you have until May 15 to make a decision without incurring higher premiums. Coverage would begin the month after you sign up. So if you sign up May 15, coverage would begin June 1.

Many experts advise patience -- and focusing on your specific needs when it comes to Part D coverage.

Byron Pietras-Kiefer, 64, worked with her parents to help them pick out a Part D plan already. But she said as of two weeks or so ago, the Medicare Web site, www.medicare.gov, didn't list information about what prescription drugs were available through some specific insurers.

Pietras-Kiefer, who works with seniors at the independent-living apartments called the Park at Trowbridge in Southfield, ended up picking a Medicare prescription drug plan for her parents through AARP. The monthly premium is \$28.

Her parents, who live in Detroit, already had AARP medical coverage and their drugs were covered by the AARP Medicare drug plan. So, she said this choice seemed to make sense.

Yet given the spotty information so far, some advocates have said that consumers shouldn't try to even pick a plan this week -- especially if they still don't have as much information as they need.

"I wouldn't recommend it," said Mary Johnson, director of the Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program in Michigan, which is offering free assistance to seniors. The phone number is 800-803-7174.

"You might want to wait until the dust settles and the kinks are out."

Early last week, even the people who are supposed to help seniors were befuddled.

"This Internet tool was supposed to be the be-all-and-end-all. It's still not working," said Carrie Nicholson, Medicare-Medicaid assistance coordinator for the Area Agency on Aging 1B in Southfield.

Nicholson said her agency was getting 400 calls a day last week. It could only take phone numbers and names and promise to get back to people.

"Everybody's hands are tied right now as for getting personalized information."

Contact SUSAN TOMPOR at 313-222-8876 or tomp@freepress.com.

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SUSAN TOMPOR: Don't be in a rush to change drug plan

November 15, 2005

BY SUSAN TOMPOR
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Second of five parts

Barbara and Ted Coden got a letter that most retirees would be thrilled to receive.

Ted once was in charge of the Michigan sales staff for Heublein, which is now part of the British spirits company called Diageo.

Diageo told the West Bloomfield couple last month that their prescription drug plan under the company's medical coverage would continue. The letter noted that Diageo's coverage is as good as any plan they could sign up for under Medicare's new drug program.

While millions of Americans are trying to decide which Medicare drug plan is right for them, Barbara and Ted can -- and will -- stick with the company's coverage. They're among the luckiest retirees: They already have help paying their drug bills and don't need government assistance. In fact, they pretty much don't have a choice. They must keep that Diageo prescription drug coverage if they want to hold on to the Diageo medical plan.

The letter warned: "Please be aware that if you are a retiree and do decide to enroll in a Medicare prescription drug plan, you and any covered family members will no longer be eligible for Diageo coverage -- including both medical and prescription drug coverage -- and will not be able to get this coverage later."

It's a warning that retirees from other companies have gotten, too.

Employers who continue to offer drug insurance as good or better than Medicare's will get a federal subsidy for the drug purchases of each

retiree. So the companies have an incentive to keep retirees on their drug plans.

And some employers have another reason for telling their retirees that it's all or nothing. Those who offer their retirees health care coverage typically lump everything together -- hospital, doctor and drug coverage. It's not like retirees are being charged separate premiums for their drug coverage and medical coverage.

But don't assume that all big companies are handling this new change in the same way. They're definitely not sending the same information. So Barbara Coden tells her friends and others to read those letters carefully and to save them.

General Motors Corp., for example, has told its retirees that its plan is as good or better than the new Medicare drug plans.

But GM also told retirees that, if they want, they can sign up for a Medicare prescription drug plan elsewhere and they would be able to keep their medical coverage from GM.

If a GM retiree signs up for another drug plan, that retiree's GM drug coverage would be suspended for 30 days before actually being terminated, according to Carey Osmundson, a spokeswoman for GM. That way, if a mistake were made, the retiree could redo the process and get back on the GM drug plan within that 30 days, she said.

Also, she said a GM retiree who signs up and uses another Medicare drug plan and then later wants to reenroll in the GM drug plan would be able to do that, too.

Not all companies are offering those options.

As for the Codens, they don't mind one bit that they must keep both types of coverage.

"We're just happy to have it," Barbara Coden said.

The couple -- who have two grown sons and seven grandchildren -- know they have good insurance benefits. Their income is more than \$45,000 a year, with Ted Coden's pension, Social Security and money used from savings and investments.

They pay \$40 a month in medical insurance premiums, which includes drug coverage. They can get a 90-day supply of their prescriptions by mail for \$5 each.

Ted Coden, 76, has about 10 prescriptions. Barbara Coden has four: Detrol, which treats an overactive bladder; Nexium, which treats acid reflux; Fosamax, which treats osteoporosis; and a replacement for thyroid hormones.

"It is good coverage," said Barbara Coden, 71. "It's better than anything you could get privately and you can't beat the cost."

During most of this year, Coden had been quite concerned about all the talk about the new Medicare drug plan. Her group, the Centennial Chapter of the Jewish Women International, sponsored a talk in May to give more details on the new plan and then sponsored a talk on Part D last week. And she's still reading up and learning more about the

process.

She's also playing around with the Web tools at www.medicare.gov to try to help her friends pick plans. She has learned to use the pull-down menu to view the cost details -- which is key to choosing the right plan. She's telling her friends that they need to carefully plug in their prescriptions to pick out plans -- and not just opt for the lowest premium.

"It's really fascinating," she said.

Barbara Coden wants to understand the rules because no one really knows how long some companies will continue to offer retiree health care coverage. She knows well that plenty of companies have cut retiree medical coverage, and others, like Ted's old company, could do the same in the future.

"Nothing is written in stone -- it could change next year," she said.

Contact SUSAN TOMPOR at 313-222-8876 or tomp@freepress.com

5-PART MEDICARE DRUG PLAN SERIES

How are seniors choosing which Medicare prescription drug plan is best for them? Or whether to sign up at all?

Here's what they're telling the Free Press — and you — in a weeklong series that continues today.

THE SERIES: <http://freep.com/index/medicare.htm>

MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION SIGN-UPS START TODAY

Seniors can begin signing up today for prescription drug insurance through Medicare.

But if you're not ready to sign up, relax. You still have plenty of time to enroll before benefits begin Jan. 1. You can take until May 15 without any fear of penalties.

Michigan retirees must sort through up to 78 plans from 18 companies that offer a wide range of monthly premiums, co-pays, deductibles and benefits. (It's very important to remember that every plan does not pay for every drug).

In this weeklong series, seniors explain how they are making such a difficult choice.

DATES TO REMEMBER

TODAY: First day to sign up for a Medicare drug plan.

JAN. 1: First day to use the Medicare drug coverage if you have signed up.

MAY 15: Last day to join a drug plan without paying a penalty, unless you qualify for an exception.

BARBARA AND TED CODEN

Ages: Barbara, 71; Ted, 76.

Hometown: West Bloomfield.

Living on: Social Security, a pension and investments.

Spending more than \$45,000 a year in retirement.

Drugs: Ted Coden has about 10 prescriptions. Barbara Coden

has four. They're happy to have good prescription drug coverage from Ted's retirement benefits through the British spirits company Diageo. The coverage is as good or better than Medicare's Part D. So they don't intend to look for another plan.

Barbara's advice to other seniors: Be on the lookout for any letters from employers, unions or others that write about "Creditable Prescription Drug Coverage." Carefully read and reread any such letters. Guard those letters like gold. If the company discontinues its good coverage in the future, the letter is proof that you once had coverage and you won't be forced to pay any penalties if you sign up for a Medicare Part D plan after May 15, 2006.

Widespread confusion: The new Medicare drug plan offers 40 plans from 17 insurers. Befuddled seniors must pick just one

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

By Jeff Alexander

MUSKEGON CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

Public reaction to the federal government's new Medicare prescription drug plan might best be summed up in two words: Dazed and confused.

Many senior citizens in West Michigan said they do not understand the plan, which has a six-month enrollment period that begins today. Everyone eligible for Medicare must choose a Medicare-approved drug plan by May 15, 2006, or face a financial penalty. People with better private insurance may opt out of the government plan.

The trouble is, the Medicare prescription drug benefit requires senior citizens in Michigan to choose from a list of 40 plans offered by 17 private insurers, and has pages of complex rules reminiscent of the federal tax code.

"They've made this so confusing, it's just awful," said Sandy Coon, 67, of Muskegon.

Coon was one of about 140 people who attended an informational meeting Monday about the Medicare drug plan at First Baptist Church in Muskegon Township. Several people who attended the meeting said they were still confused afterward about the government-run prescription drug plan.

"It's a little hard to make up your mind without talking to people from the individual plans," said Arloa Hoeker, 80, of Muskegon.

Hoeker's 83-year-old husband, Alex, was suspicious of the government's prescription drug plan.

"It's a step towards socialism," he said.

The Medicare plan is an effort to provide an affordable prescription drug benefit to more Americans. Despite the government's best intentions, the plan has triggered widespread confusion, according to area pharmacists, residents and health-care providers.

"We're getting questions about this every 10 minutes," said Dwayne Bloemers, pharmacist and owner of Pfaff Pharmacy in Grand Haven. "People are basically confused. They just don't know what to do.

"It's pretty frustrating when someone comes to you for guidance and you have to stand there and tell them you just don't know which plan is a good plan," Bloemers said. "Right now, we're telling people who have nothing (no prescription drug coverage) to at least sign up for a plan."

Viola Trevino, who works for Senior Resources in Muskegon, said the elderly are being overwhelmed by information about the Medicare drug plan.

Trevino said Medicare recipients should take the time to read a booklet the government sent out recently regarding the prescription drug benefit, known as Medicare Part D, and then meet with an insurance agent they trust to determine which plan would be best for them.

The co-pays and deductibles for prescription drugs can vary dramatically among plans, Trevino said.

Under the standard Medicare drug benefit, a person pays the first \$250 each year for prescription medication. For the next \$250 to \$2,250 in prescription drug expenses, the individual pays 25 percent. The patient picks up all drug costs between \$2,251 and \$5,100, but the plan pays 95 percent of prescription drug costs that exceed \$5,100 annually. An individual would pay a maximum of \$3,600 annually for prescription medication under the standard Medicare plan, according to government documents.

"People who don't have prescription drug insurance, low-income people, and people who take a lot of medication will benefit the most from this plan," Bloemers said. "The big question is whether it makes sense for other people to sign up."

Wanda Hoffman, of Muskegon, said she could not figure out whether the Medicare plan would end up costing her more or less money for prescription drugs.

Hoffman, a 68-year-old widow who has no health insurance, said she spends about \$100 per month on prescription medications.

"I'm totally confused," Hoffman said after a recent meeting on the Medicare drug plan in Whitehall. "This idea of contacting different insurance companies for information is overwhelming."

Hoffman said the Medicare drug plan has made her retirement more difficult.

"Old age, they used to call it the golden years. Don't believe it," Hoffman said.

MEDICARE ANSWERS

Think about facility when picking plan

Jeanette Deb's parents are in a Macomb County nursing home and both receive Medicare and Medicaid.

QUESTION: Do I have to sign them up for a new plan or will they automatically be enrolled in a plan?

ANSWER: Because your parents have both Medicare and Medicaid and live in a nursing home, they automatically qualify to have their Medicare Prescription Drug Plan premiums, co-pays and deductibles covered by Medicare.

They do need to select a Prescription Drug Plan or a Medicare Advantage Plan (with the drug plan attached) and must do this by Dec. 31, or Medicare will select one for them. Your parents will need to select a plan that has their nursing home's long-term care pharmacy in its network of providers.

The answer to today's question comes from experts on the new law at the Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program.

MMAP volunteer counselors are available at 800-803-7174 and can provide information about events where experts answer questions.

To compare plans, go to www.medicare.gov or call 800-633-4227.

By Ruby L. Bailey

Medicare drug benefit still baffling for many Seniors must make complicated choices

Ann Arbor News Editorial

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

Enrollment in the new Medicare drug benefit program begins today.

If it's as beneficial to seniors as the Bush administration has been insisting since the president signed it nearly two years ago, why then is it giving so many of them headaches?

Officials say that's because change is upsetting. And when change involves health care benefits, difficult or even painful decisions for many are inevitable. After all, said Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt, health care is complicated, like "registering your car."

The last time we registered our car, we didn't have to wade through almost 80 Secretary of State offices to do so.

One and a half million Michigan residents on Medicare are needing to make decisions about their medications. They can choose from among nearly 80 drug benefit plans offered by 18 companies. Like seniors around the country, they're confused.

According to a survey released last week by the Harvard School of Public Health and the Kaiser Family Foundation, only about one in three individuals 65 and older said they understood the new drug benefit program.

What seniors ought to understand, officials say, is that typical beneficiaries can cut their drug costs in half. And low-income seniors can save even more. Officials note that all plans are required to provide coverage at least as good as Medicare's standard coverage, which pays on average 75 percent of drug costs after a \$250 deductible up to \$2,250 in total drug spending. But seniors also will be needing to make decisions on whether they should select plans that solely involve drug benefits or drugs and health maintenance organizations. They'll need to sort through deductibles, premiums, co-pays, what drugs are covered and which pharmacies will provide them.

If you're a senior and after researching benefit options you're still as uncertain as you are now, don't fret. Some of those who have made health care their livelihood are just as confused. "The whole thing is hopelessly complicated," said a retired nurse in California in a story reported in The New York Times.

There are ways to make informed

decisions, however. Log on to www.medicare.gov, which compares plans, consult your Medicare and You 2006 handbook, call Medicare's speech automated system at 1-800-633-4227 or the Michigan Medicare Medicaid Assistance Program at 1-800-803-7174.

If you still are uncertain which option is best for you, ask family members or trusted friends to help you make sense of it all.

As in so many consumer decisions, there's likely not just one right answer.

Dose of reality

Failure to change health care is changing health care

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

As we all watch costs spinning out of sight, it's a truism to say the American health care system needs to change.

The irony is that while we sit waiting for systemic change (which many of us picture as something to be worked out in Washington), it's already happening all around us.

In the absence of carefully drawn plans whose merits or drawbacks we could all consider and debate, this change comes at us piecemeal, company by company, industry by industry, health plan by health plan. And though the changes are decentralized, they're far from wide-ranging: At every turn, Americans are being asked - or ordered - to pay from their pockets a greater share of the cost of care.

Look no farther than the new tentative agreement between the UAW and General Motors, which shifts billions of dollars of the company's health care cost burden to workers and retirees. Ford and DaimlerChrysler are expected to ask soon for similar concessions. Bankrupt parts-maker Delphi Corp. already has.

It has become painfully clear to most observers that this is not a tactic, a bluff or a temporary patch. This is the new and spreading reality. That UAW members voted, resignedly, for the GM plan shows that workers understand.

And as if this present reality weren't enough, the baby-boom retirement tsunami about to roll in - bringing growing needs for medical benefits and a shrinking pool of workers to pay for them - will only worsen the problem.

If there's a bright side, it could be this: These private-sector changes may provide useful real-world data for the health care debate - sort of an unintended national experiment.

This is not to slight people who are being hurt or inconvenienced by changes they didn't ask for and don't want. And it's not to let Washington off the hook for failing to effectively tackle a pressing national challenge.

But it could be we're about to see some key questions answered.

Will increased personal responsibility - driven by paying more out of pocket - make consumers smarter about health care choices, or will it leave them unwilling or unable to seek needed care?

Will people take better care of themselves to stay well, or will they quit the very medications and treatments that keep them well? Will any of this slow the rate of cost increases, or must we look elsewhere for solutions?

The de facto health care "reform" now before us is not a pretty picture, but it's one we may need to take a long look at if we want the real thing to work.

National leaders and policy makers - and those who want to be - had better watch and learn.

Editorials & Letters

Grant could cure my disease

FLINT JOURNAL LETTER TO THE EDITOR

FLINT TOWNSHIP

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

JOURNAL READER

After reading about Medicaid ["Medicaid reduction to hurt Michigan, Granholm says," Region & State, Oct. 26, Page A5] and the high cost of health care at Delphi, I wonder why isn't anyone looking into why health care costs keep rising?

I contracted a very contagious disease, but I could not get a doctor's appointment for six weeks. Why am I paying so much a month for this little plastic card, just to carry it around in my pocket?

I decided to go to an emergency clinic, where the doctor saw me for two minutes before his nurse wrote a prescription for some pills that make me swell up like a blow fish.

I can tell everyone the symptoms in case they have caught this nasty disease. The symptoms are a pain that runs from your buttocks up your spine to the back of your neck to the back of your eyeballs and gives you a very, very bad outlook on life.

I'm pretty sure I came in contact with this disease by living this thing called life. But I am sure if the government gives me a \$100-million grant, I could find a vaccine for this virus before the disease spreads.

Rhonda J. Kietzman
Flint Township

Parents to contend they were unaware of abuse in home

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

By John Agar
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- Once honored as Michigan's adoptive parents of the year, Jerome and Beryl Richards sat at the defense table Monday as attorneys quizzed potential jurors about corporal punishment, religious beliefs, adoption and sex abuse.

The state is trying to permanently remove their 12 adopted children amid allegations the Kentwood couple allowed sexual abuse, and crossed the line from discipline to abuse by spanking the children with belts, shoes and extension cords. Authorities also say the couple withheld food from the children.

The Richards denied the allegations, and are fighting to keep their children. During questioning of prospective jurors, their attorney, Kevin Cronin, suggested children lied to authorities about alleged abuse. He said it would not be unusual for parents to be unaware of sexual abuse of younger children.

"Kids will do things, you know, you don't have eyes in the back of your head, and you might miss something. Is that reasonable?" Cronin asked a prospective juror, who agreed.

He asked others if they would hold the parents accountable for sexual abuse they knew nothing about. He also suggested the Richards' religious beliefs justified corporal punishment of the children.

Jury selection was to resume this morning before Kent County Family Court Judge Nanaruth Carpenter. Cronin, Assistant Kent County Prosecutor Vicki Seidl and attorneys representing the children questioned prospective jurors for about six hours.

The Richards are not charged criminally.

Once the jury reaches a decision, the judge will determine whether their parental rights should be severed.

Jerome Richards, 59, and his 53-year-old wife had their 12 children, ranging in age from 6 to 21, taken away in May. Social workers say the couple had "full knowledge" of abuse, but did not stop it.

"Our defense is going to be that we didn't know about that (alleged sexual abuse)," Cronin said.

"The state says we did know about that and we failed to take appropriate action."

In the gallery, supporters wearing white ribbons backed the couple.

Seidl, the prosecutor, along with attorneys for the children, Kristan Newhouse and Paula Hines, asked potential jurors about corporal punishment. Some said they spanked their children, but most condemned use of belts and other objects.

"I believe that's over the line of abuse, using anything but your hand on the bottom," a mother said. Another mother said: "I think there's absolutely no reason you have to use an object at all."

Before the trial started, about 25 people formed a prayer circle outside of the courthouse.

The Rev. John Tobian said the couple had big hearts for children, and kept accepting children with special needs when asked by workers at D.A. Blodgett Services for Children and Families.

The trial is set for eight days.

The Richards were named adoptive parents of the year in 2002 by the Michigan Foster and Adoptive Parent Association in Lansing.

NEWS: Local/Regional

Men accused of sexually assaulting teen in downtown Petoskey

By Steve Zucker News-Review staff writer

Monday, November 14, 2005 3:23 PM EST

Two men are sitting in the Emmet County Jail today, Monday, waiting to be formally charged in connection with a sexual assault that a teenager said took place in a downtown Petoskey parking lot late Saturday.

Police said the 17-year-old Petoskey girl reported that the incident took place in the parking lot behind the former movie theater in the area of Lake Street and U.S. 31 sometime between 8:30-9:30 p.m.

The girl told police she was walking home when she was approached by two men who forced her into the parking lot where the assault took place.

After obtaining descriptions of the men from the victim on Saturday, police located the two suspects in Petoskey Sunday. Following further investigation and interviews with the suspects, the men, ages 25 and 21, were arrested and lodged at the jail.

Police said the men are from the southern area of the United States and had been staying in Northern Michigan for about the past two weeks.

The girl was treated at Northern Michigan Hospital and released.

Lansing State Journal

November 15, 2005

Law targets false abduction reports

Starting in February, it will be a felony to falsely report a child abduction under legislation signed Monday by Gov. Jennifer Granholm.

The bills are aimed at preventing a false Amber Alert, which wastes law enforcement and media resources, according to state lawmakers.

The felony will be punishable by up to four years in prison and a \$2,000 fine.

Just last week, a 32-year-old Muskegon Township woman was charged with a misdemeanor after her report of a missing baby and teenage mother - which resulted in an Amber Alert - was shown to be false, authorities said.

Under the Amber system, short for America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response, radio and TV stations broadcast information about reported child abductions. The information also is posted on electronic highway signs in the Detroit and Grand Rapids areas.

MIRS

November 14, 2005

New Law Strengthens AMBER Alert

Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** signed four bills into law, including two that add to the already existing AMBER Alert.

The America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response (AMBER) Alert is a national network that allows for quick, early detections of child abduction by asking the media to post bulletins announcing the abduction.

SB 0074, sponsored by Sen. Mike **GOSCHKA** (R-Brant) and SB 0134, sponsored by Sen. Nancy **CASSIS** (R-Novi), create sentencing guidelines for anyone who intentionally falsely reports a missing child.

The governor also signed the following bills into law:

- SB 708, sponsored by Sen. Mike **BISHOP** (R-Rochester), which makes technical amendments to the Michigan Children's Protection Registry Act.

- HB 4316, sponsored by Rep. Edward **GAFFNEY** (R-Grosse Pointe Farms), which expands membership on county road commissions.

Grandmother, 32, faces fake AMBER Alert charge

Friday, November 11, 2005

By Lisa Medendorp

Muskegon **CHRONICLE** STAFF WRITER

A 32-year-old Muskegon Township woman has been charged with a misdemeanor after her report of a missing baby and teenage mother -- which resulted in an AMBER Alert Tuesday night -- was proven to be false, authorities say.

Christina Faith Petrongelli, of 2535 Friendship Lane, may have been afraid state welfare inspectors were going to take her granddaughter away because of recurring care problems, authorities said.

She was arraigned Wednesday before 60th District Judge Andrew Wierengo III and is free on a \$1,000 personal recognizance bond. Technically, the charge is "making a false report of the commission of a misdemeanor -- interference with a (Family) Court custody order."

"This type of conduct undermines the AMBER Alert," said Muskegon County Chief Assistant Prosecutor Brett Gardner. "We need people to take AMBER Alerts seriously."

An AMBER Alert is a notification to the public of a child abduction. In Michigan, the state police authorize the alert, which is then given to various media outlets for immediate broadcast so the public can be on the lookout.

AMBER is an acronym for "America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response." It is named for 9-year-old Amber Hagerman, who was abducted and murdered in Arlington, Texas, in 1996.

At the center of this case is the baby and his welfare.

Petrongelli is the mother of the teenager, Angela Russell, 16, and the grandmother of the baby, 7-week-old Caden Russell, according to police.

Court documents show the baby is underweight, has medical problems, including jaundice, and that his teenage mother is unable to properly care for him, according to Muskegon Township police.

Gardner said Petrongelli has legal custody of the baby.

Police said arrangements had been made to take the baby to the state Department of Human Services and the teen to Webster House, a shelter for runaways.

Prosecutors said the baby's condition was to have been checked by human services officials, but Petrongelli apparently feared the child would be taken from her.

Angela Russell had not been staying at home. Early Tuesday afternoon she was brought to the police station and Petrongelli was contacted to pick her up, police said.

But by about 2:30 p.m., police say Petrongelli was reporting both her daughter and grandson missing.

"The way the circumstances were given to us by the grandmother was that the child was abducted," said Muskegon Township Detective Ken Sanford.

Her story was that she drove to her home in Arlington Estates Mobile Village and after a brief stop to use the bathroom, she came out and found Russell and the baby gone, police said.

Police filled out the paperwork for an AMBER Alert. State police troopers reviewed it and issued the alert for the western lower region of the state, reports said. The alert was aired on local television and radio stations for about two hours, police estimated.

At 7:59 p.m., Central Dispatch received a call from Petrongelli's ex-husband Dion Russell, 35, of Hesperia, who said his daughter and grandson were at his home. A police report indicated that Dion Russell had been on his way out of state when he heard the AMBER Alert on his vehicle's radio.

According to the police report, Dion Russell said Petrongelli dropped the two off at his house around 2 p.m., saying "he now had to deal with this."

Police said Angela Russell later indicated that her mother said "she wanted what was best for the baby and she was not taking him to FIA." The Family Independence Agency is the former name of the state Department of Human Services.

Petrongelli allegedly told her daughter not to enroll in any schools and "that she probably would be listed as missing," police said.

A police report said after being picked up in Hesperia, the baby was taken to Child Haven, and the teen mother was transported to Webster House.

If convicted, Petrongelli could face 93 days in jail and a possible fine. A pretrial conference has been set for Dec. 15.

Cadillac Daily News

November 15, 2005

Hundreds arrested in sex offender sweep statewide

EAST LANSING - Director of the Michigan State Police Col. Tadarial J. Sturdivant announced that 846 people have been arrested and 836 additional arrest warrants have been requested following a 55-day, statewide initiative led by the Michigan State Police aimed at increasing compliance with the state's sex offender law.

More than 150 law enforcement agencies and prosecutors' offices participated in the states first coordinated sex offender sweep. This was the first statewide effort to proactively pick up offenders and will be an ongoing effort.

Officers targeted felony-listed offenders who failed to change or verify their address during October. Officers also conducted 3,794 random residence checks of registered sex offenders to ensure compliance with the reporting requirements of the state's Sex Offenders Registration Act.

Convicted offenders must also report a change of address within 10 days of moving, and failure to do so is a four-year felony.

As of Nov. 1, there were 37,916 offenders statewide in the Sex Offender Registry.

Police warn of pair posing as officers

Elderly women were followed home from the Maple Road Kroger store

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

BY AMALIE NASH

Ann Arbor News Staff Reporter

Ann Arbor Police believe a couple posing as police detectives followed elderly women home from a west side grocery store in July and again last Thursday in an attempt to steal money from homes.

A third incident in Ferndale in July also is believed to be linked, and authorities are warning residents to be leery of people who are not in uniform and say they are police officers.

Although the Ann Arbor cases occurred four months apart, police say they are strikingly similar.

On Thursday afternoon, a woman returned from a shopping trip at Kroger and was approached by a couple who showed a badge and said they were investigating a bank robbery in which a suspect escaped from custody, Detective Sgt. Jim Stephenson said. They asked to check the home to make sure the robber wasn't inside and even showed a wanted poster with several pictures, Stephenson said.

The woman and her husband allowed the police impostors inside, and after they searched the home and said the robber wasn't there, they asked to see the currency in the home to see if it matched the stolen cash, Stephenson said.

The residents became suspicious and told them to come back with a search warrant, Stephenson said. The impostors left empty-handed.

"The incidents from the summer and now match pretty closely, and once again it seems someone was followed home from the Kroger store," Stephenson said. "We're definitely looking closely at this and want the public to be aware of it."

In July, an elderly couple were carrying groceries to their apartment in the 1200 block of South Maple Road when a well-dressed man offered to help carry the bags for them, then showed a badge and identified himself as a police officer investigating bank robberies in the area, police said.

The man was joined by a woman, and they asked the couple to look through a book of photos of purported suspects. The man also asked to see all the cash in the household, which he was allegedly comparing to stolen bills, and they quickly left the apartment with \$200, police said.

Five days later, a similar incident occurred in Ferndale, as a woman was returning from a trip to a pharmacy. Authorities said they believed the couple targeted older citizens.

Police said anyone approached by people claiming to be police officers should ask to see department credentials, and if they are suspicious, to call the police department to verify who they are.

In last week's incident, the couple were seen leaving in a dark gray newer model Chevrolet vehicle. The man was described as black, age 30-35, 5 feet 11 inches to 6 feet tall, stocky build and wearing a mustache. The woman was described as black, age 30-35, 5 feet 4 inches tall, medium build, and short straight hair. Both were dressed professionally, police said.

Anyone with information on the cases is asked to call the Ann Arbor Police tip line at (734) 996-3199.

Amalie Nash can be reached at anash@annarbornews.com or (734) 994-6832.

New York Times Editorial

Congress's Threadbare Budget Politics

Published: November 15, 2005

After five years of budget hypocrisy, Republican leaders in Congress are floundering in their current attempt to portray themselves as fiscally responsible. Their plan to cut basic safety-net programs for the poor and use the money for a new round of ridiculous tax reductions for the wealthy is meeting resistance from the party's newly emboldened moderates. When the House returns for business today, we hope those late-arriving champions of financial and moral sanity hold firm.

The House's Grand Guignol theatrics involve \$50 billion in spending cuts that would be more than canceled by the \$70 billion lost in extending what the Republicans initially sold as "temporary" cuts in capital gains and dividend taxes.

The coalition of moderate Republicans and unified Democrats should continue holding out on the House floor. People are unhappy enough with the performance of the Bush administration and its Congressional allies these days. We doubt if they'd want their representatives to plunge the nation further into debt and cut government services, all in the name of additional tax advantages for investors.

Some of the cruel and unnecessary cuts the moderates are fighting include the following:

- \$12 billion in Medicaid cuts that would invite states to levy health care co-payments and workfare increases on the poor while dropping preventive medical care for children.
- \$14 billion from the underpinnings of some of the most vital student aid and loan programs.
- \$4 billion from efforts to enforce child support - a successful program with a four-to-one return on investment, and rooted, it should be noted, in the family-values agenda invoked by conservatives.
- \$844 million in food stamp cuts, knocking close to 300,000 working poor and legal immigrants from the program.
- The elimination of day care subsidies for an estimated 330,000 children of the working poor.

Not mentioned in the Republicans' budget stew are the lost surpluses and deepening deficits created with five years of choking the revenue flow. Conservatives posturing for "tough choices" budgeting will eventually have to find some dead-of-night moment for the unavoidable necessity of voting to raise the national debt another trillion or so to pay for all of their fiscal responsibility. Sh-sh-sh!

Homeless shelter construction begins

Goodwill Inn holds ceremonial groundbreaking

By IAN C. STOREY

Record-Eagle staff writer

TRAVERSE CITY - The Earth officially moved for a new 22,000-square-foot Goodwill Inn Homeless Shelter in Traverse City.

Executive Director Cecil McNally said about 100 people gathered Monday to watch a ceremonial groundbreaking for the multi-million-dollar project on Keystone Road, tentatively set for completion in August.

The new center will have 77 beds and room to expand up to 115 beds.

"The focus of the first shovel was to focus on the people that we serve," he said. "I think that is what everyone is in this project for, to focus on those people."

McNally said Goodwill still wants to raise approximately \$1.4 million toward the \$4.3 million goal set for the project.

Fundraising got a strong kick-start last fall after an anonymous donor pledged \$500,000, said McNally.

The project received another boost in June when Harvey and Marilyn Warburton of Empire donated \$500,000 to build the youth wing of the new facility in memory of their son, Peter, who died by suicide eight years ago.

The youth wing, tentatively named Pete's Place, will be operated by the Third Level Crisis Center and serve adolescents between 14 and 18 years old.

McNally said bids for the project were due last week, and will be organized by Comstock Construction, the project's construction manager.

"We will actually start construction this winter," he said. "We need to do some sewer and water engineering, which may take a couple weeks, but from there construction will begin."

McNally said the new center won't be used as a transitional facility for those coming out of jail who are still serving community service or other court-ordered requirements.

"It will be the same way we always operated the Goodwill Inn," he said. "It is not a transition house."

"I won't say it will never happen, but it wouldn't be the normal course for the new facility," he said. "If someone was all done, out of jail and then didn't have any place to go, they normally fit our criteria."

'Lost Boy' finds a home

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

By Matt Vande Bunte
The Grand Rapids Press

ROCKFORD -- He was lost and now is found. Happy 30th birthday to John Garang Tiop. The Sudanese "Lost Boy" has been homeless for the past two decades, but is getting a fresh start in Rockford with a job and an apartment. A birthday celebration follows the 10:30 a.m. worship service Sunday at First Congregational Church, 192 E. Bridge St.

"I thank God I found the people of God of Rockford," Tiop said.

First Congregational members have taken Tiop under their wings since learning of his relocation to the United States in September. They have welcomed him into their homes for meals, taken him to worship services, the dentist and his new job.

"I like taking care of him, I guess," said Kathye Vidal, who along with Barb Berry is coordinating church efforts in support of Tiop. "I like having someone to help."

Tiop soon will get behind the wheel of a donated car and move from refugee housing in Grand Rapids to the top of a carriage house in downtown Rockford. The new home will mean a short commute to the job he started last week molding outlets at Byrne Electrical Specialists Inc. Church members and friends plan to give Tiop supplies and furnishings for his new home -- and cake -- during the party.

Tiop was 11 when his village was attacked in a civil war that continues to rage in his native Sudan. His father was killed, and he became separated from his mother and siblings while fleeing the invaders.

"When the battle stopped, I could not find her," he recalled, adding that attempts to contact his mother have been unsuccessful.

"My heart -- I feel for them so much."

Like thousands of other "Lost Boys," Tiop fled across the border and grew up in an Ethiopian youth camp. He was living in Kenya when his name came up for refugee relocation to the United States.

In partnership with Bethany Christian Services, PARA Refugee Services hooked up Tiop with First Congregational Church. He arrived by himself this fall, part of a wave of Sudanese refugees to the area that relief workers say now has slowed to a trickle.

Tiop marvels at how "life is just good here" compared to his homeland, but he said he also feels in his heart that "home is the best." He hopes to study political science or public administration in college, then use his education to improve conditions in Sudan.

"I have to go back," he said. "I have a lot of things in my mind that I would like to do.

"Until I am in a position to help them (with education), I can't go back."

Kalamazoo Gazette

Letters

November 15, 2005

RSVP diaper drive was a success

This year RSVP -- Your Invitation to Volunteer -- and Pride Care Ambulance partnered to collect diapers to be distributed through Loaves and Fishes. According to Loaves and Fishes, the request for diapers is ongoing and normally they are only able to give out six to eight diapers per child per month.

Because of the generosity of individuals in the community, RSVP collected 3,439 diapers and 1,500 baby wipes. Pride Care Ambulance donated a van to store the diapers during the drive, as well as transport them to Loaves and Fishes. There, they were transferred, weighed (238 pounds!) and sorted.

This Make a Difference Day project was a huge success, thanks to the generosity of people in our community. A special thanks goes out to the media for publicizing the event, to individuals who took the time to purchase and drop diapers off at Senior Services and to groups such as West Oshtemo Grange 1630 for contributing to the drive.

Tracie Wheeler
RSVP director
Kalamazoo County

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Kalamazoo Gazette

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

Shoe fund leader deserves credit

Valerie Denghei's Oct. 31 letter to the Kalamazoo Gazette, "Shoe fund event was a success," is an example of "the saint selflessly applauding the efforts of others." While the individuals that Denghei thanks in her letter no doubt appreciated her public recognition of their work, I also happen to know how much they admire the countless volunteer hours she has spent obtaining shoes for children to put them on "equal footing."

Denghei began her partnership with Kalamazoo Communities In Schools Foundation during the past summer. Not only did she bring shoes for children attending summer school, she spent time helping out in a summer school classroom. The record-setting heat and humidity did not deter her from her mission.

She demonstrates that there is a role for everyone in helping to address the needs of our community's children. KCISF provided her the vehicle to implement her idea of getting shoes to children who needed them. It was her idea, her determination and energy that lead to obtaining 160 pairs of new shoes. She provided the resources and KCISF connected the resources with the need.

KCISF has an endless supply of need. We can use more resources of the kind Valerie Denghei is all about.

Pamela B. Kingery
KCISF executive director
Kalamazoo

Tuesday, November 15, 2005

A child is waiting

Young brothers offer plenty of positivity and love

By Rosemary Dorr / Special to The Detroit News

The good-natured brothers, 10 and 12, like, as well as love, each other. "Can we live together (after adoption)?" asks big brother Julio. Carlos adds, "Me and Julio would love to be together. We love to play."

The two, laughing and energetic, demonstrate their rhythm game, clapping their hands and rhyming verses.

Living apart until 1 1/2 years ago, the two are bonding, learning and growing at a residential center. "Both are wonderful boys," says their therapist. "They're creative, really intelligent, good and energetic."

Julio "loves school" and is a good student in seventh-grade classes (despite a learning disability in math). "I like workshop (best) because you get to make projects," he says.

To Carlos, a fifth-grader, positive leader and "computer freak," school "is OK. I like math and science. I'm friendly to little kids. I like to be helpful. And I like to read."

"You're taking my answers," jokes Julio, adding, "'I'm helpful, pleasant and thankful.' He explains, "I'm thankful to be alive, have food on my plate and clothes on my body and thankful to have a brother. I'm thankful for a lot of stuff."

The boys, whose mother is deceased, would be extra thankful for a caring, permanent family.

Please consider adoption and talk with Bonnie Powers at Wayne County Department of Human Services, (313) 396-0394.

Last column's children: Now in two foster homes, brothers Alvin, 11, and Kellyn, 2, each offer something special. For information, call Barbara Shelton at Catholic Social Services of Wayne County, (313) 883-7684.

A Child is Waiting appears Tuesdays in Features.

CAPITAL NOTEBOOK

HEART GALLERY: The Department of Human Services, the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange and Adoptive Family Support Network are collaborating on a photo display in the Capitol rotunda to bring attention to the plight of children awaiting adoption.

The display will include photographs of 60 of the 4,000 children for whom parental rights have been terminated but for whom adoptive parents have not yet been found. DHS officials said most of the children in the show – and awaiting adoption – are older children or minorities who are traditionally hard to place.

The display will be unveiled at a press event t 11:45 a.m. Tuesday.



JENNIFER M. GRANHOLM
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
LANSING



MARIANNE UDOW
DIRECTOR

News Release

Contact: Stepheni Schlinker or Maureen Sorbet (517) 373-7394

Michigan Heart Gallery Debuts in Lansing *Public to view professional portraits of Michigan foster children who are waiting for adoption*

November 15, 2005

LANSING – As the Thanksgiving holiday draws near, most of us take time out to think about the things we are thankful for in our lives, especially our families. For a special group of children in Michigan, a family is something they are hoping to find for this holiday and all of those to come.

November is National Adoption Month and Governor Jennifer M. Granholm has declared November as Adoption Month in Michigan as well. There are more than 4,000 children in Michigan with parental rights terminated who are either waiting for their adoption to be finalized or waiting for a family. Most of these children are among those hardest to place – kids who are older and members of minorities and/or sibling groups. Adoption for older youth in the foster care system is a priority to ensure they do not leave the foster care system without a connection to a supportive adult.

Sixty of these children are featured this month in a heart-warming photographic exhibit called The Michigan Heart Gallery. A preview of The Michigan Heart Gallery will be on display in the first floor rotunda of the state capitol building in Lansing at 11:45 a.m. on November 15. The full exhibit in Lansing is scheduled to open to the public November 19 in the ground floor rotunda of the Michigan Library and Historical Center building, located at 702 W. Kalamazoo Street. The exhibit will then move to Impression 5 Science Center in Lansing on December 3, staying there until January 9, 2006.

The Michigan Heart Gallery, a collaborative effort between the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, the Adoptive Family Support Network and the Michigan Department of Human Services, seeks to bring our community closer to the faces and voices of children waiting for a “forever family.” The Michigan Heart Gallery features portraits of Michigan’s waiting children who come from various regions of the state and are representative of different races and ages.

“The Michigan Heart Gallery has been an amazing undertaking,” Kristen Donnay, intake coordinator for the Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange, said. “The portraits of the children are compelling. They draw you in and make you feel like you know the child. Equally as impressive has been the time, energy and compassion that the photographers have brought to the project.”

Recruitment activities such as the Heart Gallery remind people that there are many children in Michigan who are waiting to be adopted.

-MORE-

"Most of the children featured have been waiting for a long time to find a family to call their own," Marianne Udow, director of the Michigan Department of Human Services, said. "While we hope the children featured in The Heart Gallery will find families, the larger goal of The Heart Gallery is to promote the idea of caring for and adopting children from the foster care system. We know from experience that if these children are not seen, and if we do not continue to educate the public about older children who need families, then they are forgotten. We are thrilled that the public will have a chance to view these portraits, get to know the children and possibly take action to see if adoption may be right for them."

The photographs in The Heart Gallery were taken by more than 50 professional photographers who donated their time, talent and resources to take portraits that help capture the spirit of children in the foster care system. The Heart Gallery allows these children to be seen in an artistic, poignant and tasteful photographic exhibit. The kids thoroughly enjoyed their photo shoot experience. Some children were able to help select which portrait to feature in The Heart Gallery, while others came up with their own poses and some were given lessons in photography during the photo shoot, allowing them to become budding photographers themselves. Professional photographer Andre LaRoche volunteered to participate in The Michigan Heart Gallery and photographed 11-year-old Anthony.

"After meeting Anthony and walking around the youth home looking for a location to photograph him, I had to wipe tears from my eyes," LaRoche said. "My son is four years old and I give him and he gives me so much love. Without him, my life would be empty. I cannot easily think of all the boys at this center, with no loving parents, without a home, with their hopes and dreams possibly out of their reach."

Another piece of The Michigan Heart Gallery is a small sampling of portraits of successful adoptive families. The Heart Gallery will feature up to 10 families who have opened their hearts and homes to children from the foster care system.

"These wonderful families show others that it is possible to build a family through special needs adoption," Udow said. "Despite the rough times that they might have faced along the way, they prove how much love and care can do for these children."

Lansing is the first stop of a multi-city tour for The Michigan Heart Gallery. In the coming months, the portraits will be on display in cities throughout Michigan including Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, Saginaw and St. Ignace.

In response to the success of Heart Galleries across the country, AdoptUsKids, a national photo listing service for children awaiting adoption across the United States, is debuting the first-ever National Heart Gallery which opened in Washington D.C. on November 1, 2005. Three Michigan Heart Gallery portraits are featured along side portraits from 27 other states. Additionally, Voice for Adoption, a national advocacy group, is sponsoring a similar project for National Adoption Month. They have placed portraits of waiting children in federal lawmaker's offices. U.S. Rep. David Camp of Midland, is participating by featuring a Michigan Heart Gallery child in his office during November.

The Heart Gallery concept was initially founded by the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department in 2001 as a way to help foster children in protective custody who are waiting for adoptive families find the families they desire. Stirring photographs, which reveal the children's spirits and individuality, have helped many of them find loving homes. The Heart Gallery has expanded to dozens of states and cities since 2001. Heart Galleries all over the United States have been featured in *People* magazine, the *New York Times* and on CNN, MSNBC and the Today Show.

For more information about The Michigan Heart Gallery and how you can get involved, please call (800) 589-6273 or visit The Michigan Heart Gallery Web site at www.miheart.org

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